

Skills Partnership Self-Assessment Rating Sheet

This rating sheet was developed to help practitioners examine their local/regional area’s current capacity and ability to establish and operate regional skills partnerships, sector-based initiatives, and related activities that contribute to a demand-driven workforce system. Such an examination also helps to identify activities and competencies where additional development is needed to strengthen an area’s ability to undertake such efforts. The rating sheet describes various factors whose presence has been shown to be associated with effective institution-building, planning, and implementation activities that lead to successful outcomes for employers and workers. The factors were originally identified in the course of Public Policy Associates, Inc.’s national evaluation of 50 U.S. Department of Labor demonstration projects that focused on skills shortages. The factors are also consistent with best practices identified in national evaluations of approximately 80 sectoral and incumbent-worker demonstration projects conducted by The Urban Institute, Aspen Institute, and Workforce Learning Strategies.

As with many tools, this rating sheet should be used with caution. “Success factors” are highly contextualized. Consequently, the factors may not be applicable in all situations. Moreover, even though an array of factors is presented, no claim is made that these factors are exhaustive of those contributing to outcome success. Practitioners are encouraged to use the process of examining the various factors, assigning self-ratings, and considering the scores obtained to begin a larger effort of dialogue, planning, and implementation. Ultimately this approach should result in tangible benefits to workers and employers alike.

Directions: Place a check in the appropriate rating box; put that number on the score line. Add the scores to obtain subtotals for each section and place the subtotals in the score tally on page 11. Add all the subtotals together to obtain an overall score.

Factors Related to the External Environment

Organizational Standing in the Community

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Limited experience			Emerging leader				Established leader		

Score: _____

An established leader is an organization that is widely recognized as being responsible, knowledgeable, and experienced in conducting workforce development initiatives. An emerging leader is an organization that has a significant stake in workforce development and has some connections to other stakeholder groups. Organizations with little or no experience in conducting a workforce development initiative have a more difficult path to follow and should carefully assess their desired short-term and long-term roles while planning for the skills project.

Connections to the Workforce Development System

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No active role for WIB			WIB plays support role				WIB plays lead role		

Score: _____

Initiatives in which the WIB plays a lead role involve WIB staff, members, and resources in a variety of activities including setting strategic priorities for the project, providing staff to support the work of the project, assisting in securing project funding, helping to build connections with and among area employers, and facilitating connections between employers and area One-Stop Career Centers. A WIB that plays a support role contributes to the development of an initiative that is being led by a partnering organization. It is possible to conduct a skills shortages initiative with little or no active involvement of the WIB. However, this may preclude or severely limit the ability to link the initiative to key resources and sustain future activity.

Alignment with State and Regional Priorities

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No information/ not aligned			Consistent with state/regional priorities				Closely aligned		

Score: _____

Projects that are closely aligned with state and/or regional priorities are directly linked to the existing workforce development, economic development, and/or education infrastructure in a state or region. Projects that are consistent with state and/or regional priorities are not yet connected to broader policy networks at the regional or state level. Not every initiative needs to be connected to broader workforce development networks: a project may be intended simply to address the workforce needs of a single employer or relatively small group of employers in an industry sector. However, if working with a single employer, changing business conditions may have a dramatic impact on the project, increasing or decreasing the demand for skilled workers.

Employer Involvement in Planning Process

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not yet involved			Contributors to the process				Fully involved		

Score: _____

Employers are fully involved if they played an active role in developing the project concept and making key decisions about project design. Employers that contribute to the planning process play a less intense role, serving in an advisory capacity only, responding to requests for information, providing feedback on curriculum materials, etc. With limited input from employers, there is an increased risk that employers may not see the value of the initiative or feel that it addresses their workforce development needs.

Section Subtotal: _____

Factors Related to the Use of Information

Using Data to Identify Skills Shortages

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Data not available/ not relevant			Secondary data sources only				Primary and secondary data		

Score: _____

Primary data are gathered explicitly for the project using surveys, focus groups, and personal interviews to gather systematic information about demand occupations and skill needs and gaps that exist in the labor market. Secondary data have been previously collected by other entities (including Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Census Bureau, and reports from entities such as chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, universities, state agencies, etc.) that may possess useful information and recent studies relevant to the skills shortages initiative. Some skills shortages initiatives may elect to proceed with little or no systematic review of labor market data. However, with an absence of data, there is little or no independent basis upon which to analyze labor market conditions and build consensus around regional priorities or make planning decisions.

Using Data to Engage Stakeholders

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Internal use only			Passive				Active		

Score: _____

An active approach engages stakeholders in forums and other group settings to review and comment on the findings of primary and/or secondary research. A passive approach provides stakeholders with an opportunity to review existing data on a limited or informal basis without an explicit expectation for feedback or comment. Available data may be intended for internal use only, such as in documenting labor market conditions for the purpose of submitting a grant proposal.

Section Subtotal: _____

Factors Related to Employer Engagement

Understanding the Industry

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Little knowledge/ experience			Indirect knowledge				Direct knowledge		

Score: _____

Initiatives that have direct, extensive experience working with targeted industries have a deep understanding of specific occupational skills shortages and the approaches to workforce development that are needed to address them. Initiatives with limited direct experience with employers in a targeted industry may choose to augment their industry knowledge by working through knowledgeable intermediaries, such as employer and industry associations. While it is possible to launch a skills shortages initiative with a limited amount of knowledge or exposure to a targeted industry, the success of the initiative will hinge upon the ability of the initiating and leading organizations to manage the process so that greater industry involvement is achieved.

Recruiting Appropriate Organizational Decision Makers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Engage only one level within employer organizations			Engage limited levels within employer organizations				Engage multiple and appropriate levels within employer organizations		

Score: _____

Engaging organizational executives in strategic decisions about project priorities helps to ensure employer commitment to the goals of the initiative. Involving managerial/supervisory staff in later stages of training-program design and implementation helps to ensure that the implementation phase of the project runs smoothly and effectively. The most effective programs typically establish connections at all of the critical levels.

Employer Role

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Employer contact			Employer-advisory				Employer-driven		

Score: _____

In employer-driven models, employers take ownership of the program and make key decisions throughout its lifetime. In the strongest models, employers define the need for the program, articulate the expected outcomes, and work collaboratively among themselves and with the WIB and other partners to measure impact and identify needed program improvements; these models generally cannot be achieved without strong employer involvement in the planning process (see page 2). Employer-advisory models represent a more moderate expectation for employer involvement in the functioning program and solicit employers' feedback regarding program merits and drawbacks. The employer-contact model involves employers as customers of a finished product and may invite feedback on the value of the delivered product, but does not involve employers in an ongoing role.

Employer Investment

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No financial contribution			In-kind match				Substantial monetary investment		

Score: _____

Programs involving a substantial monetary investment by participating employers may feature employer-paid training, on-the-clock training for incumbent workers, and substantial organizational investment in the design of the program. An in-kind match of time or facilities for program planning or training delivery represents a more moderate employer investment. Programs with no financial contribution from participating employers involve fully subsidized training. Employer investment is a strong indicator of program sustainability and perceived value.

Section Subtotal: _____

Factors Related to Organization and Structure

Scope of Project

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Narrow			Moderate				Broad		

Score: _____

A program has a broad focus if it seeks to address and involve several different systems or stakeholders that contribute to the development of a high-quality workforce for the given industry and/or occupation, including workforce development, public education, economic development, social services, health care, faith-based organizations, labor unions, etc. An initiative has a moderate focus if it seeks to address the needs of a targeted industry sector or cluster with the involvement of a reduced number of key stakeholders. An initiative has a narrow focus if it seeks to serve the needs of a single employer or employer niche and engages few, if any, important stakeholders.

Project Staffing

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No training or experience			Training or experience				Training and experience		

Score: _____

Relevant experience and training includes knowledge of the industry, facilitation skills, administrative skills, research skills, and experience with the design and delivery of specialized training. Projects may rely on professional development opportunities, direct experience among staff, or both to support the program. The least intensive option uses existing staff without benefit of direct experience or training.

Roles and Responsibilities

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
To be determined			Informal agreement				Formal agreement		

Score: _____

Roles that are defined through charters and other written agreements provide stakeholders with descriptions of what tasks they are responsible for completing or participating in, along with a timeline for project activities. Roles that develop as informal agreements are those that, for one reason or another, are still evolving and may be subject to change pending input from stakeholders. It is possible to launch a skills shortages initiative with a very tentative idea of how the project will be operated. However, the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities may siphon an extraordinary amount of energy away from the primary tasks of the initiative.

Project Management

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
To be determined			Administrator				Collaborator		

Score: _____

A project manager who serves as a collaborator works actively to facilitate partnership and discussion, seeks opportunities to build relationships, seeks feedback from project partners, and assists the partnering organizations to understand and utilize the varied skills and knowledge each brings to the table.

Managers who serve as project administrators oversee day-to-day operations, monitor budgets, prepare written materials for review by project partners, and maintain accurate project records and participant files. Even though a project manager may not be identified and hired until after a grant award has been made, it is important to think strategically about the expectations for that role in the overall project.

Sustainability Plan

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
To be determined			Component of project strategy				Central to project design		

Score: _____

Sustainability is central to the project design of initiatives that focus on the development of an entity or infrastructure to address regional or industry-specific workforce development needs. Initiatives that include sustainability as a component of their project strategy plan to adapt selected aspects of the project for use in other contexts once the grant period ends. Some projects may not have a plan for sustaining the initiative but may intend to focus on developing one in later stages of the project. Contrary to popular belief, the ability to sustain a project is seldom successful if the subject is broached near the end of the initiative.

Section Subtotal: _____

Factors Related to Training Program Alignment

Targeted Occupations

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Informal estimates			Secondary data sources				Primary data sources		

Score: _____

Use of primary data includes conducting original research with employers in an industry sector or cluster to identify targeted occupations. Secondary data sources include existing labor market information that may be available through state and local government agencies and economic development organizations. An informal estimate of occupational skills shortages and skill gaps is based solely on the perceptions of those who are engaged in discussions regarding the need for new or improved training programs.

Occupational Skill Assessments

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Information sharing			Individual needs assessments				Systematic job profiling		

Score: _____

Systematic job profiling entails the use of formal assessment instruments to compile job profiles offered by individual employers in order to discern common needs for specific competencies that cut across multiple employers. Individual needs assessments are more tailored to the needs of individual employers or a small number of related companies and may or may not result in the identification of common needs and competencies. Information sharing is an informal approach to gathering information that does not include any rigorous examination of job requirements or skill sets.

Curriculum Development

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
New curriculum required to address documented needs			Existing curriculum must be updated/modified				Existing curriculum meets documented employer needs		

Score: _____

Programs that use existing curriculum locate an off-the-shelf curriculum that is aligned with the skill sets and learning needs identified as the focus of the program and documented through careful needs assessment. If an existing curriculum is not a perfect match, it may be possible to update or modify a product to reflect the changing skills or additional requirements that are identified through an assessment process. In the event that existing curricula do not match the documented skill and learning needs, it may be necessary to create a new curriculum.

Recruiting

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
To be determined			Build recruiting networks				Use established recruiting networks			

Score: _____

Established recruiting networks are groups of organizations, service providers, and agencies that have existing linkages in a community that can be used to disseminate information about training and employment options available through the skills shortages initiative. Depending upon the stage of development of a workforce collaborative, it may be necessary to focus energy on building recruiting networks. If a plan is not in place for tapping into or creating a recruiting network, it is essential to think about this aspect of the initiative in the course of creating a plan for addressing skills shortages.

Individual Skill Gaps

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
No assessments			One assessment				Multiple assessments			

Score: _____

Programs that assess students before enrollment, after enrollment, and after program completion are best able to monitor student needs and learning gains—a benefit to both students and instructors and a strong source of data for continuous program improvement. If no assessments of individual skill levels are conducted, the process of enrolling in classes may be streamlined. However, the ability of both the trainee and the instructor to benefit from the instructional program will be compromised.

Section Subtotal: _____

Factors Related to Performance Measurement

Internal Management Focus

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not yet aligned			Partially aligned				Fully aligned		

Score: _____

When goals and measures are aligned, there is a high level of coordination between the goals of the project and the measures used to track progress towards achieving them. When goals and measures are not closely aligned, it becomes more difficult to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program and to identify the factors that contributed to project outcomes. While it may be appropriate to develop performance measures in conjunction with project partners, it will be important to consider the performance-measurement-system development and operating costs when creating a project budget and timeline.

Creating Systems to Monitor and Track Progress

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
To be determined			Accountability				Management tool		

Score: _____

Systems to monitor and track progress facilitate the analysis of performance data to identify patterns of characteristics and outcomes that may be used to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the skills shortages initiative. Depending upon the size, complexity, and longer-term expectations for conducting a skills shortages initiative, it may be worthwhile to create an electronic database system to track training program enrollment, completion, placement, retention, and advancement data. If the project work plan includes a very limited amount of training, it may not be necessary to invest in the development of an elaborate database system. However, even a simple system may be a useful, time-saving way to generate summary reports.

Focus on Business Impact

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Impact not measured			Anecdotal evidence				Business impact measures		

Score: _____

Business impact measures are performance measures that document and quantify the impact that training has on work processes, productivity, employee retention, or other elements of company functioning. Anecdotal evidence consists of testimonials provided by participating employers as to the effectiveness and impact of training on the company. If performance information is collected and summarized simply to comply with reporting and accountability requirements, the likelihood of having a broader impact on workforce development system practices is limited.

Section Subtotal: _____

<u>Score Tally</u>	
Page 2 External Environment (40)	Subtotal: _____
Page 3 Use of Information (20)	Subtotal: _____
Page 5 Employer Engagement (40)	Subtotal: _____
Page 7 Organization and Structure (50)	Subtotal: _____
Page 9 Training Program Alignment (50)	Subtotal: _____
Page 10 Performance Measurement (30)	Subtotal: _____
(Total: 230)	Total Score: _____

Lower scores indicate that the initiative may benefit from further development within the factor category or faces substantial barriers; higher scores indicate that the initiative is relatively advanced within the factor category.

Reminder: Decisions regarding project goals, strategies, and implementation choices must be made within the historical, organizational, political, and social context in which the initiative is embedded. Because of the highly contextual nature of skills partnership programs, this form should be used as a starting point for discussing the relative strengths and weaknesses of local initiatives.